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**ABSTRACT**

The results of a recent Harris poll, as reported by the Director of Research for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), suggest that the way people use television has changed: people who watch tend to do other things while watching. While this may be true of commercial television, the same poll indicated that viewers of public broadcasting programs pay more attention and are more involved in the programs. The CPB suggests that this is because the plots of many commercial television programs tend to be very predictable, while those of public broadcasting programs are not. Other polls reported by the Corporation indicate that since 1965, there has been a 23 percent increase in audience size for public broadcasting, with 38 percent of households interviewed having watched a public television station in the last week. A dramatic increase in public television viewing was found for minority groups--this is probably due to the fact that "Sesame Street" is beginning to penetrate into these households. Additional findings were that median hours watched per week increased from 1.5 to 1.9 percent, that public television viewers are more selective in their viewing, and that public television is seen as less biased than commercial stations. (SH)

Public Television: How Our Users See Us

October 18, 1971  
Leroy Miller - Director of Research, CPB

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FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS THE CORPORATION HAS  
TAKEN THIS FORUM TO TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT  
RESEARCH EFFORTS OF THE CORPORATION OVER THE  
PAST YEAR, BUT BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT NUMBERS,  
I SHOULD LIKE TO REFRESH OUR RECOLLECTION  
ABOUT OUR PERCEPTIONS OF AUDIENCE. AS WE HAVE  
SAID SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST, WE ARE NOT  
MERELY IN THE AUDIENCE DELIVERING BUSINESS.  
AS WE TALK ABOUT AUDIENCE WE ARE MORE  
CONCERNED WITH THE EFFECT, THE IMPACT, AND  
THE PENETRATION THAT OUR PROGRAMMING HAS ON  
VIEWERS AND WE SEEK TO INVOLVE OUR VIEWERS  
IN OUR PROGRAMS. I LIKE TO  
CHARACTERIZE OUR PROGRAMMING EFFORTS AS  
ADOPTING THE RIFLE APPROACH. IT CONCERNS

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ITSELF WITH SPECIFIC TASTES AND INTERESTS OF ITS VIEWERS. IT DOES NOT SEEK IN ANY HOUR TO ATTRACT ALL OF THE POSSIBLE VIEWERS IN THE SIGNAL AREA, BUT RATHER TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY AND CREATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR SPECIAL TASTES AND INTERESTS. WHILE A GIVEN VIEWER'S TASTES AND INTERESTS MIGHT NOT BE SERVED ON SUNDAY NIGHT FROM 9 - 10 PM, HE MIGHT CHECK US OUT AGAIN ON TUESDAY NIGHT FROM 8 - 9 PM AND FIND SOMETHING THAT SUITES HIS TASTES AND INTERESTS.

FOR SOME TIME WE HAVE SUSPECTED THAT THE AVERAGE TELEVISION VIEWER IS USING TELEVISION IN A WAY DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WAY HE DID IN THE PAST. WHEN THE TELEVISION SET FIRST COMES INTO THE HOUSE THE TELEVISION

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SET CONTROLS THE HOUSEHOLD. AFTER THE INITIAL  
REALIZATION THAT A PICTURE AND SOUND COME  
OUT OF THE BOX, THE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS THEN  
BEGIN TO ASK "SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?" SINCE  
THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT THIS IS  
WHAT A TELEVISION SET CAN DO THEN THEY START  
TO SELECT FROM ANY OF THE VARIOUS CHOICES  
BEING OFFERED. AFTER A WHILE, THE HOUSEHOLD  
HAS PRETTY MUCH FIGURED OUT HOW MATT AND KITTY  
ON GUNSMOKE ARE GOING TO REACT IN A GIVEN  
SITUATION, ~~SO WHEN THEY DO IT,~~ THEY WATCH  
WITH A REASONABLE DEGREE OF ATTENTIVENESS FOR  
THE FIRST 3 or 4 MINUTES TO GET SOME IDEA OF  
WHAT THE CONFLICT IS GOING TO BE THAT NIGHT,  
AND MAYBE ANOTHER 8 to 10 MINUTES LATER IN  
THE PROGRAM, THEY CHECK TO SEE WHAT, IF ANY,  
*changes*  
EVENTS IN THE PLOT, AND THEN MAYBE ANOTHER

10 to 15 MINUTES LATER THEY CHECK IT AGAIN  
TO SEE HOW THE PROBLEM IS GOING TO BE RESOLVED  
AND THEN ABOUT 4 MINUTES BEFORE THE SHOW IS  
ENDED THEY WILL LOOK AGAIN TO SEE HOW THE  
PROBLEM IS DEALT WITH.

THESE CHANGES IN THE WAY PEOPLE USE  
TELEVISION ARE A FUNCTION OF THE PREDICTABILITY  
OF IT. HOWEVER, WITH PUBLIC BROADCASTING  
WHEN VIEWERS ARE WATCHING , LET'S SAY  
"JULIA CHILDS" SHOWING YOU HOW TO PREPARE  
COQ-AU-VIN, IF YOU TURN YOUR HEAD AWAY FROM  
THE SET YOU MAY MISS HOW MUCH WINE TO PUT  
INTO IT, HOW FREQUENTLY TO STIR IT, OR EVEN  
HOW LONG TO COOK IT, SO THAT WHEN THE VIEWER  
WATCHES PUBLIC TELEVISION HE BECOMES INVOLVED  
IN THE PROGRAM. A VIEWER CAN NEVER PREDICT  
HOW AN ENCOUNTER ON "FIRING LINE" WILL BE

RESOLVED OR WHAT "BIG BIRD" WILL DO NEXT,

OR GET HIMSELF A GLASS OF WINE IN THE MIDDLE  
OF "NET PLAYHOUSE".

IN THE HARRIS SURVEY CONDUCTED DURING  
THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER WE ASKED THE  
2031 RESPONDENTS WHAT THEY DID WHEN THEY  
WATCH TELEVISION. WHEN WATCHING COMMERCIAL  
TELEVISION A LITTLE LESS THAN 6 OUT OF EVERY  
10 EITHER OFTEN OR SOMETIMES LEAVES THE  
TELEVISION SET ON EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE OUT  
OF THE ROOM. HOWEVER, ONLY A LITTLE OVER  
A THIRD OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS DO THAT.  
PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS ARE LEAST LIKELY  
(26-35%) TO WATCH TV WITHOUT INTERRUPTION  
FOR AN ENTIRE EVENING - OR READ A MAGAZINE  
WHILE VIEWING (23-35%). A LITTLE LESS THAN  
A THIRD THINK THEY ARE WASTING TOO MUCH TIME

WHEN THEY ARE WATCHING COMMERCIAL TELEVISION  
AS CONTRASTED WITH ONLY 14 PERCENT OF THE  
PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEELING THAT WAY.

WHEN ASKED IF THEY REALLY GET ABSORBED IN  
THE PROGRAMS COMMERCIAL TELEVISION VIEWERS  
INDICATE (71%) THAT THEY OFTEN OR SOMETIMES  
GET REALLY ABSORBED IN THE PROGRAM, BUT ONLY  
66 PERCENT OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS  
RESPOND THAT WAY.

I THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP  
THIS FRAME OF REFERENCE IN MIND WHEN  
TALKING ABOUT AUDIENCE.

IN STATING THIS PREMISE FIRST, THIS IS  
NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE TWO MEASURES WE USED  
LAST YEAR DO NOT INDICATE THAT OUR AUDIENCE  
IS UP, INDEED IN 25 MARKETS MEASURED FOR

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THE CORPORATION BY THE AMERICAN RESEARCH  
BUREAU OUR AUDIENCE HAS GONE UP FROM 1970 TO  
1971 BY 11 PERCENT. AND, IN 19 MARKETS WHERE  
WE HAVE COMPARABLE DATA GOING BACK TO 1965  
OUR AUDIENCE HAS INCREASED BY 23 PERCENT.  
LAST YEAR THE HARRIS STUDY INDICATED THAT  
32 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS HE VISITED  
WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION IN THE  
PREVIOUS WEEK. THIS YEAR THAT FIGURE HAS  
INCREASED TO 38 PERCENT. NOT ONLY THAT,  
IN 1970 NINETEEN PERCENT STATED THAT THEY  
WATCHED A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION WITHOUT  
ANY AID FROM THE INTERVIEWER, BUT THIS YEAR  
THAT FIGURE GOES UP TO 28 PERCENT. THIS  
INDICATES NOT ONLY A HIGHER LEVEL OF VIEWING  
BUT A MORE SOLID IMPRESSION IN THE MINDS OF  
OUR VIEWERS. WHEN WE LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHICS

THE MOST DRAMATIC SHIFT OCCURS IN THE  
VIEWING OF BLACKS. IN 1970 THIRTY-FIVE  
PERCENT OF THE BLACK HOUSEHOLDS HAD WATCHED  
THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. THIS  
YEAR THAT FIGURE INCREASED TO 52 PERCENT.  
WHEN WE THINK ABOUT OUR NATIONAL PROGRAMMING  
FOR BLACKS AS BETWEEN 1970 AND 1971 THERE  
WAS NO CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PROGRAM  
OFFERINGS FOR THAT COMMUNITY SO I SUSPECT  
THE INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF VIEWING IS  
PROBABLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT "SESAME STREET"  
IS BEGINNING TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT PENETRATION  
IN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS. IN A STUDY CONDUCTED  
IN EIGHT OF THE LARGEST CITIES AMONG A  
SAMPLE OF 2400 BLACKS, WHEN WE ASKED RESPONDENT:  
WHO HAD CHILDREN SIX OR UNDER WHICH PROGRAM

THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED 47 PERCENT OF THEM  
NAMES "SESAME STREET". THE NEXT PROGRAM  
MENTIONED RECEIVED A RESPONSE RATE FROM  
10 PERCENT OF THE HOUSEHOLDS. PARALLELING  
THAT EFFORT WE CONDUCTED A STUDY AMONG  
1400 SPANISH SPEAKING RESPONDENTS IN EACH ↑  
HARLEM AND THE SOUTH BRONX IN NEW YORK,  
WHICH ARE PREDOMINANTLY SPANISH SPEAKING  
COMMUNITIES, SOME 54 PERCENT OF THESE  
HOUSEHOLDS RECALLED "SESAME STREET" AS THE  
PROGRAM THEIR CHILDREN WATCHED ON THEIR  
LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION. BUT THEY  
WERE SUBSEQUENTLY ASKED IF THEIR CHILDREN  
WATCHED "SESAME STREET" 96 PERCENT OF THESE  
HOUSEHOLDS INDICATED THAT THEY DO.  
LAST YEAR SOME 37 PERCENT OF OUR VIEWERS

WATCHED US LESS THAN ONE HOUR A WEEK. THIS

YEAR THAT FIGURE GOES DOWN TO 30 PERCENT,

SO, NOT ONLY ARE MORE PEOPLE WATCHING US

BUT THEY ARE ALSO WATCHING US MORE

FREQUENTLY. THE MEDIAN HOURS INCREASED

FROM 1.5, to 1.9 PERCENT WITH THE MOST

DRAMATIC INCREASES OCCURRING AMONG BLACKS,

WHO VIEW MORE PUBLIC TELEVISION THAN ANY

OTHER GROUP. ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE

SELECTIVITY OF PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS,

MORESO, THAN ANY OTHER GROUP (37%), ALMOST

ALL OF THE TIME BEFORE THEY WATCH TELEVISION

THEY LOOK IN THE NEWSPAPER TO SEE WHAT IS ON,

AND ALMOST 9 PERCENT OF THEM SAY THAT ALMOST

ALL OF THE TIME THEY SELECT THEIR PROGRAMS

BY FLIPPING FROM CHANNEL TO CHANNEL.

WE ALSO ASKED THESE RESPONDENTS TO  
COMPARE PUBLIC TELEVISION AND COMMERCIAL  
TELEVISION AS TO WHETHER IT OFTEN PRESENTS  
A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. YOUR STATIONS ARE  
SEEN AS LESS BIASED (16%) THAN THE COMMERCIAL  
STATION WHERE 42 PERCENT FEEL THAT IT IS  
TRUE THAT THE COMMERCIAL STATIONS OFTEN  
PRESENT A BIASED POINT OF VIEW. WHEN ASKED  
TO RATE PUBLIC TELEVISION AS TO THE  
QUALITY OF THE JOB THEY ARE DOING IN  
PRESENTING FAIR AND UNBIASED DOCUMENTARIES  
(43%) SAY THAT THEIR LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION  
STATION IS DOING AN EXCELLENT OR PRETTY  
GOOD JOB, WITH 37 PERCENT FEELING THAT ABOUT  
THEIR LOCAL COMMERCIAL STATION. OF THE  
TOTAL SAMPLE ONLY 7 PERCENT FEELS THAT THEIR  
LOCAL PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION TENDS TO

TO FAVOR A CERTAIN POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW  
WITH 35 PERCENT SAY IT PRESENTS ALL POINTS  
OF VIEW. A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE OUT OF  
EVERY TWO FEELS THAT TELEVISION IN GENERAL  
GIVES THEM ENOUGH OF A CHOICE AND VARIETY  
OF DIFFERENT THINGS TO WATCH, 48 PERCENT OF  
THE PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS FEEL THAT THEIR  
LOCAL PTV STATION PROVIDES THEM WITH SUFFICIENT  
CHOICES.

47 PERCENT OF THESE RESPONDENTS FEEL  
THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS EITHER A  
GREAT DEAL OR SOME CONTROL OVER WHAT IS  
SHOWN ON PUBLIC TELEVISION BECAUSE OF THE  
FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT.

DETAILED COPIES OF THE HARRIS 1971  
REPORT AND THE ARB 1971 FINDINGS WILL BE

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FORWARDED TO EACH STATION MANAGER SOMETIME  
WITHIN THE NEXT TWO OR THREE WEEKS. WHILE  
OUR FOCUS IN THESE REPORTS HAS BEEN ON  
NATIONAL PROGRAMMING IF YOU FEEL WE MAY BE  
ABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN ANY LOCAL RESEARCH YOU  
MIGHT UNDERTAKE WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO RESPOND  
TO ANY REASONABLE REQUESTS YOU MAY HAVE.

MUCHAS GRACIAS.....